



## The Truth Behind **SPAYING AND NEUTERING** Learn the Facts

**Myth:** Female dogs and cats should have at least one litter before being spayed.

**Truth:** There is no medical evidence to justify allowing a dog or cat to have a litter before spaying. In fact, spaying female dogs and cats eliminates the possibility of developing uterine or ovarian cancer and greatly reduces the threat of mammary cancer.

**Myth:** Animals become less active and overweight as a result of spaying or neutering.

**Truth:** As any animal matures, it is necessary for human guardians to adjust dietary intake to compensate for more sedentary lifestyles. Animals become overweight only when they are fed too much and not exercised properly.

**Myth:** Behavior is adversely affected by sterilization.

**Truth:** The only changes in dog and cat behavior after spaying or neutering are positive changes. Male cats tend to reduce territorial spraying, depending on their age at neutering. Neutered dogs and cats fight less, resulting in fewer bite and scratch wounds and lessening the spread of contagious diseases. Male dogs and cats tend to stay home more after neutering because they no longer wander in search of a mate.

**Myth:** Children should witness the miracle of birth.

**Truth:** Most dogs and cats have their litters at night in quiet, dark places far out of anyone's sight. Besides, every litter of puppies and kittens born contributes to the thousands of unwanted dogs and cats who die every day across America in our nation's pounds and animal shelters.

### **Health Benefits of Spaying and Neutering**

#### **Male Cats**

An urge to breed increases the chances that a male cat will slip out of the house in search of a mate and suffer fight wounds and other injuries. Most serious cat fights occur between unneutered males. The resulting wounds frequently develop into abscesses that must be surgically drained and treated with antibiotics. Worse, even a single bite can transmit deadly diseases—

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Feline Immuno-deficiency Virus (FIV) or Feline Leukemia (FeLV)—from one cat to another.

### Female Dogs and Cats

Spaying removes the ovaries and uterus from female animals and eliminates the possibility of ovarian and uterine infection or cancer. Bacterial infection of the uterus (pyometra) commonly afflicts older unspayed dogs and cats. As pyometra advances, bacterial poisons enter the bloodstream, causing general illness and often kidney failure. If the uterus ruptures, the dog or cat will almost certainly die. Pyometra requires emergency spaying, which may fail to save an animal already severely weakened. The best preventative is to spay dogs and cats while they are young and healthy.

Spaying can also prevent mammary gland tumors, the most common tumor in unspayed female dogs and the third most common in female cats. A high percentage of mammary tumors are malignant: in dogs, nearly 50 percent; in cats, nearly 90 percent. An unspayed dog is approximately 4 times more likely to develop mammary tumors than a dog spayed after only two heats, and 12 times more likely than a dog spayed before her first year. An unspayed cat is seven times more likely than a spayed cat to develop mammary tumors.

Spayed dogs and cats avoid the dangers of giving birth. A birth canal that is overly narrow—due to injury (such as a broken pelvis) or, as in bulldogs, to a breed trait of narrow hips—make giving birth perilous. So does inadequate body size, which can leave a Chihuahua, toy poodle, Yorkshire terrier, or other small dog too weak to deliver puppies naturally. Such disabilities often necessitate Caesarian section to save the dog or cat's life. When a small dog begins to nurse her puppies, she is also vulnerable to eclampsia, in which blood calcium plummets. Initial symptoms include panting, high fever, and trembling. Unless given an emergency intravenous injection of calcium, the dog may suffer seizures and die.

### Male Dogs

Neutering removes the testicles and so prevents testicular tumors in male dogs. A dog who develops a testicular tumor must be treated before the tumor spreads by the only effective means—neutering. Especially prevalent

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in older dogs, testicular tumors are the second most common tumor in male dogs. Some dogs have one or two “undescended” testicles, which remain inside the body; these dogs have a particularly high risk of testicular tumors. Although only a small percentage of testicular tumors are malignant, even non-cancerous ones can threaten a dog's life. One type of nonmalignant testicular tumor sometimes secretes the hormone estrogen at a toxic level that destroys the bone marrow's ability to produce blood cells—a fatal outcome.

By eliminating the sexual drive that can cause a dog to bolt from the house or yard, neutering helps protect dogs from injuries and diseases associated with roaming in search of a mate. Neutering decreases roaming, one study found, in 90 percent of male dogs. Once on the loose, a dog may be hit by a car, harmed by an act of cruelty, or infected with a disease transmitted by another animal. He can also be seriously wounded in a dog fight—always less likely if a dog has been neutered, since neutering reduces aggressiveness toward other male dogs.

### Behavior Benefits

#### Female Cats

Most unspayed female cats experience heat cycles during ten months of the year. While in heat, many cats writhe and yowl—loudly and continually—any hour of the day or night. By eliminating the heat cycle, spaying frees cats (and their humans) from considerable stress.

#### Female Dogs

Spaying female dogs prevents the irritability and aggressiveness that some dogs show while in heat.

#### Male Cats

Most unneutered male cats spray urine to mark territory. In contrast, only one in ten neutered males sprays. The urine of an unneutered male cat has an exceptionally strong odor. Neutering male cats at any early age usually eliminates this unpleasant behavior.

#### Male Dogs

In many male dogs, neutering reduces or eliminates sexual mounting behavior and territorial urine-marking (including any taking place inside the house)

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especially when neutered at an early age.

### **Commonly Asked Questions About Spaying and Neutering**

#### **Q. Is spay or neuter surgery painful?**

**A.** During a spay or neuter surgery, dogs and cats are fully anesthetized, so they feel no pain. Afterwards, most animals seem to experience some discomfort, but signs of discomfort disappear within a few days, and with pain medication, pain may not be experienced at all.

#### **Q. Is spay or neuter surgery expensive?**

**A.** Spay or neuter surgery generally costs less than most major surgeries, especially if the dog or cat is young and healthy. At South Bay Veterinary Hospital, we offer low-cost spaying and neutering because we believe it is best for your pet's health, and we want to do our part in helping to reduce the serious problem of pet overpopulation.

#### **Q. Shouldn't a female dog or cat have one litter, or at least one heat cycle, before being spayed?**

**A.** To the contrary, a dog or cat has the best chance of good health if spayed before her first heat. Early spaying reduces the risk of mammary tumors and prevents life-threatening uterine infections.

#### **Q. Can a pregnant dog or cat be safely spayed?**

**A.** Many dogs and cats are spayed while pregnant to prevent the birth of puppies or kittens. A veterinarian must consider the health of the pregnant animal as well as the stage of pregnancy, before deciding whether she can be safely spayed.

#### **Q. Do spayed or neutered animals get overweight?**

**A.** In some dogs and cats, metabolism does decrease following spaying or neutering. Nevertheless, if fed only the appropriate amount of food and if adequately exercised, spayed or neutered dogs and cats are unlikely to become overweight.

#### **Q. Does spaying or neutering make dogs and cats less affectionate?**

**A.** Freed from the urge to mate, dogs and cats tend to be calmer and more content after spaying or neutering. Spayed or neutered dogs and cats are



more, not less, likely to show affection toward their human companions.

#### **Q. At what age can spaying or neutering be done?**

**A.** Because early spaying or neutering is optimal, dogs and cats usually have the surgery at about 6 months of age; with advanced techniques and safer anesthetic drugs, a growing number of animals are being spayed or neutered at 3 to 6 months of age. Even dogs and cats who are years older, however, benefit from being spayed or neutered.